

County Profile: Mercer

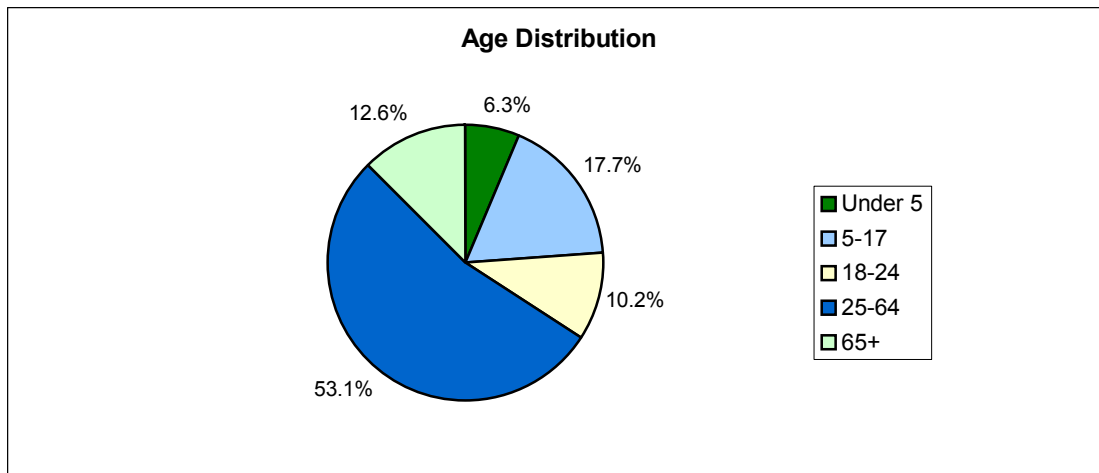


General Demographics

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 350,761 individuals reside in Mercer County's 13 municipalities. These individuals are spread out over a land area of 225.93 square miles, which translates into a population density of 1,552.5 persons per square mile. This makes Mercer County the 12th most populous of the state's 21 counties, and the eighth most densely populated county in the state.

At 7.7%, Mercer County grew less from 1990 to 2000 than the statewide average of 8.9%. The county's major urban municipality, Trenton experienced a 3.7% reduction in its population over the past decade (total 2000 population – 85,403). The remaining twelve municipalities experienced some growth, exceeding 35% for several communities, most notably Washington township at 76.7% (total 2000 population – 10,275). Population changes over the past decade resulted in Hamilton township displacing Trenton as the county's most populous municipality.

Mercer County has 84,337 children under the age of 18. They comprise 24% of the county's total population and 4% of the state's child population. Approximately 63% of Mercer County residents are of working age (18 through 64), and 12.6% are 65 years and older. The median age is 36 years of age. In its age distribution, Mercer County has a larger proportion of 18 to 24 year olds, 10.2% compared to 8% statewide, reflecting the county's many colleges and universities. In terms of other age groups, the county resembles the state as a whole.



Child Welfare

Mercer County's portion of statewide child abuse and neglect referrals is greater than the proportion of children residing in the county. While 4% of all children in New Jersey reside in Mercer County, 5.7%, or 2,203 of the child abuse and neglect referrals are generated there. Overall, the patterns of abuse and neglect resemble the state pattern.

Child Abuse and Neglect Referrals in 2001

	Mercer County		New Jersey	
	N	%	N	%
Physical abuse	716	32.5	12,382	32.0
Emotional abuse	3	0.1	330	0.9
Sexual	123	5.6	2,179	5.6
Neglect	1,254	56.9	22,099	57.1
Multiple types	107	4.9	1,716	4.4
<i>Total</i>	2,203	---	38,706	---
Substantiated rate per 1,000 children	3.8	---	4.0	---
Percent substantiated	14.7	---	21.8	---

In the Mercer County District Office, the active DYFS caseload is 2,468 children and 1,268 families. There are 274 in-state foster homes in Mercer County. There are 335 Mercer County children in foster care, which is 4.3% of the 7,807 children in foster care in New Jersey and slightly greater than the percentage of children residing in this county. Of the Mercer County children in foster care, 42.4% reside in a different county than their family, which is less than the out-of-county statewide average of 44.6%.

From 1998 to 2002, two children in Mercer County died as a result of abuse and neglect out of a statewide total of 123. No family of these children had an open/active case with DYFS at the time of their death. One case had been unknown to DYFS, while the other case had been closed. The number of all infants who died in Mercer County in 2000 was 38, 5.3% of the 723 infant deaths occurring in the state. The infant mortality rate of 8.1 deaths under the age of 1 per 1,000 live births was higher than the statewide rate of 6.3.

Child Welfare Outcome Measures

Information on various child welfare outcomes for Mercer County is presented in the following table.¹ Mercer County does better compared to the national standard in two areas, recurrence of maltreatment and placement stability. The percentage of child abuse and neglect cases in which there is a recurrence of abuse and/or neglect within six months is 1.6%, the second lowest in the state, and substantially lower than the national standard of 6.1%. Compared to a national standard of 86.7%, 88.1% of Mercer

¹ See definitions that follow for detailed descriptions of the categories presented in this table.

children who have been in placement no more than twelve months, have no more than two placements within that time period.

In other areas, Mercer County does not meet the national standards for child welfare outcomes. Particularly striking is the percentage of children exiting foster care who re-enter care within 12 months of a previous episode, 16.2% compared to a national standard of 8.6% and the second highest in the state. In addition, compared to the national standard, a smaller percentage of Mercer foster children were reunified with parents or caregivers within twelve months of discharge from foster care, while the county's incidence of abuse and/or neglect within foster care exceeded the national standard of .57%. There was also a smaller percentage of children who exited foster care for adoption within 24 months compared to the national standard (15.9% compared to a national standard of 32%).

2001 Child Welfare Outcome Measures by County

	Mercer County	State	National Standard
Recurrence of maltreatment	1.6%	6.4%	6.1% or less
A/N incidence in foster care	.73%	.78%	.57% or less
Reunify within 12 months without increasing re-entry	66.7%	59.5%	76.2% or more
Re-enter care within 12 months	16.2%	8.2%	8.6% or less
Reduce time in foster care to adoption	15.9%	16.3%	32.0% or more
Increase placement stability	88.1%	86.2%	86.7% or more

Note. Data supplied by DYFS

Definitions

Reduce recurrence of maltreatment – of children who were victims of substantiated or indicated child abuse and/or neglect during the first six months of the reporting period, the percentage who had another substantiated or indicated report within a six-month period.

A/N incidence in foster care – of children who were in foster care during the reporting period, the percentage that was the subject of a substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff member.

Reunify within 12 months without increasing re-entry – of children reunified with parents or caretakers at time of discharge from foster care, the percentage reunified within 12 months.

Re-enter care within 12 months – of children who entered foster care during the reporting period, the percentage that re-entered care within 12 months of leaving foster care episode.

Reduce time in foster care to adoption – of all children who exited foster care to adoption, the percentage who exited within 24 months.

Increase placement stability – of all children who had been in foster care less than 12 months, the percentage who had no more than two placement settings during that time period.

Data Sources

DYFS Approved Foster Homes File, 8/4/03
DYFS Caseload Activity Report (DAR-SISM-5), 8/1/03
DYFS, Child Abuse and Neglect in New Jersey Statistical Report for 2000
DYFS Child Abuse and Neglect in New Jersey Statistical Report for 2001
DYFS Foster Care File Extract, 6/6/03
DYFS Statewide Summary of Foster Homes (DAR-PCISM-1), 7/4/03
NJ Substantiated Abuse and Neglect Child Fatality Analysis for 1998-2002, July 2003
U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990
U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Redistricting Data Summary File, Population for the Counties and Municipalities in New Jersey: 1990 and 2000 (PL1)
U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 1, Geographic Comparison Table, Age and Sex (GCT-P5)
U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 1, Geographic Comparison Table, Population, Housing Units, Area and Density (GCT-PH1-R)
U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 1, Quick Table, QT-P2.
U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Demographic Profiles, Profile of General Demographic Characteristics (DP-1)

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